

Rhondda Cynon Taf Public Services Branch Newsletter **- AUTUMN 2005 -**



Pensions update

Richy's Editorial

It has been a very busy, stressful few months and I've been so grateful for my weekends away at the caravan unwinding.

Lyn has moved into an agreed secondment as our representative on the 'Job Evaluation' team, therefore I am indebted to the Environmental Services division for allowing Mark to take the opportunity to assist me full time for the next few months.

Looking back over my time as secretary I recognize it's been much change and reorganization and wonder when we can look forward to things settling down for yet there is still much uncertainty amongst our colleagues. This theme was one of my introductory comments to the Labour group when they took over control, "Please bring to a stop much of this unnecessary disruption", yet we still see changes rolling forth in an attempt to become ever more publicly accountable eager to provide ever better services.

The GMB resource centre in Taff Street has been an overwhelming success for the region. So much so that the branch has approached RCT for alternative office space, freeing up the much needed desk for regional activity and allowing us opportunity to develop a branch meeting area where we can readily gain access to files that at present remain in storage, and with agreed employer secondment have the branch phone more permanently manned. 'YES!' that mean even more change.

I hope you enjoy and are encouraged by this edition of our newsletter; my grateful appreciation is to all that have contributed.

There has been little information regarding the proposed pension changes in the last year! Probably because there has not been any definite conditions agreed since our mass demonstration last March when the Branch released its special pension's bulletin laying out in detail the proposals and our objections to many of them.

The Regional Office is in the process of writing to all members with an update of the situation; if you don't get your copy please contact the branch.

From our understanding the argument still resolves around the '85 year' rule, with the Trade Unions determined to retain this benefit.

In answer to your many enquiries! Why wasn't our pension claim included amongst the recent government back down on NHS, Teachers, and Civil Servants Pensions? This is because we are in a three way party negotiations, where the Local Authority's as our employer demands an input and unfortunately the predominately Tory controlled Councils of England are taking the opportunity to try and get out of their long term pension commitment's.

RCT Council Members in theory support our claim but like many other Authority's they do not have direct negotiating involvement.

The recent 'back down' over other government pensions is a victory that can only make our position in Local Authorities stronger. However there is a clear message to any one not in the 'Pension Fund' to rethink their position before they "miss the boat", it appears that changes are leading to a two tier benefit scheme where the new joiners will pay more for less in their retirement.

You can have confidence that the GMB national representatives are sustaining a good fight to secure the best possible pension settlements for our future, and have reserved the right to take a legal challenge on decisions that we find unacceptable. It is also reassuring that the ODPM has already back down on its imminent implementation to some changes as a direct result of quality GMB intervention.

We should prepare our members, as many believe there will be further industrial dispute before we come to an amicable resolve of this matter.

Compensation Payout's

Within RCT Area the GMB solicitors managed to win a total £94,064 compensation in the last year for 17 of our members who submitted work related claims.

Yet another example of the GMB working hard for our members

GMB -Full time membership for as little as £2.25 per wk
Working Under 21 hours - Only £1.18

Changes in Education

GMB comrades of Swansea City Branch are meeting at County Hall on Wednesday, 9th November 2005 to prepare a response to the Education Authority's proposals to cut retainer payments and transfer staff to monthly pay.

The Union has been negotiating on behalf of Secretarial Staff and Classroom Assistants as part of the School Workforce re-modeling agreement.

The Education Authority have now stated that support staff will have to transfer to monthly pay and relinquish their right to retainer payments, to which they are entitled during school holiday periods.

Jeff Burns, GMB's Swansea based Regional Organizer said today:

"It cannot be right that school support staff who have been undervalued and underpaid for many years are now taking on new roles and additional responsibilities, worthy of a higher grade and more pay but are expected to concede long-standing contractual rights. The Education Authority have been warned that any attempt to impose detrimental changes to conditions of employment may force the union to conduct a ballot for industrial action, which may even result in school closures. We sincerely hope that this course of action will not be necessary."

Our Branch will be monitoring this situation closely and give such support as required mindful that we have similar negotiations in Education.

The Customer is ALWAYS Right?

We have concerns about the increased number of cases going to investigation regarding complaints from customers dissatisfied with employee's conduct, some of which lead into formal disciplinary. We should remind all our members, whether you have a front line involvement with the public or are simply approached whilst on duty, of the RCT commitment to 'Customer Care'.

Everyone should remain courteous and as helpful as possible, this is still expected even when you are facing a torrent of abuse and in any such incident we would recommend our members to respectfully hand the customer onto the next in charge or politely as possible withdraw from the situation making sure you formally record the incident with your line manager immediately. Remembering the customer is ALWAYS right no matter the situation and an unfriendly or inappropriate altercation will only add further trouble to a problem and could lead to your possible suspension.

Every complaint made by any member of the public is taken seriously, investigated, and appropriate action followed this is known to have resulted in dismissal in a more serious incident.

If you have reported a particular problem with a customer on more than one occasion and there appears to be no follow up action we would ask you to discuss the matter with your shopsteward.

Equal Rights - Mark Bowler

Forthcoming Regional Race Meeting
Friday 2nd December 05
10:30am - 1:30pm *Buffet Lunch Included.*

This meeting to be held in Bristol City Centre in an attempt to encourage more involvement from delegates in that area as the main subject is pertinent to the Local Elections in England next May.

The main speaker is Mick Rix a National Officer of GMB, who is currently involved in several campaigns that highlight the dangers and warn of the rise of extreme fascism.

An additional afternoon tour to the 'Waterfront Museum' where you get a poignant reminder to Bristol's ignominious past. A City established on the prophets generated in Black Slavery.

Any persons interested in these issues and would like to attend should phone Pam Drake at the Cardiff Office on 029 2049 1260 as soon as possible.

Warm Welcome!

The branch takes this opportunity to introduce Gareth Morgans and Kelly Andrews who together take over from Mike Payne as a result of the recent re-organization at Regional HQ.

We wish Mike well in his new roll where he takes a more involved part in networking with our elected Welsh Assembly Members.

Gareth & Kelly are our first contact for Regional support, Gareth already out and about within RCT meeting Officers when attending some of the more important meetings and members when the opportunity allows him to call into the workplace. Gareth is based at the Regional Resource Centre in Pontypridd, alongside Richy. Kelly still based at HQ comes in to deal with those areas that are staffed by predominantly women workers but slowly her face is also becoming known in the County Borough.

JOB EVALUATION

This is the biggest project currently that our Branch representatives of all the RCT recognised Unions have involvement with, and "for better or worse" is going to affect the pay of approximately 2/3rds of the workforce as it attempts to bring about a modern fairer pay structure that redresses the current situation of predominantly women occupations being undervalued.

Lyn Evans has already taken up his post as our rep overseeing the project as to make every thing fair and open as possible. The team has set up office in Aberdare and has adopted the "Greater London Council Provincial Scheme" which is a much preferred option by other Local Authority's and the Unions.

Training as how the evaluation is to work is taken place amongst many of our stewards and will be an essential asset when individuals receive "Evaluation Forms", we recommend that any one who receives such a form, completes it with the input of other colleagues in the same post and a shop steward that has been on the training.

Stewards remember take into account that the computerized version that is being used does give a little more flexibility for point scoring than the hard copy version we sat through on training. Never will it be more important to talk up your job description, however it must still be accurate as your manager has to approve it. Remember, "What you leave out is LEFT OUT, and what should not be in is taken out and you will have a chance at appeal if so determined".

"Very Interesting!"

An analysis by the GMB of the latest Government figures released shows Welsh councils were unable to collect a total of £30.458 million in council tax in the financial year 2004/5 which is an increase on the £29.303 million Welsh uncollected council tax in 2003/4. Rhondda Cynon Taf at £4.223 million tops the Welsh league for uncollected council tax, followed by Merthyr Tydfil at £2.779 million and Swansea at £2.705 million. A statistic depicted throughout Wales and the rest of UK.

"Now tell us you can't afford to pay us our pension?"

STOP PRESS - - - STOP PRESS - - - STOP PRESS

In response to our members concerns we called for a 'Divisional Health & Safety' visit to Ynysangharad Park who have now submitted a in-depth report and recommendations for improvements to the 'Parks Department', and we are currently awaiting their response.

Health & Safety - Craig Jones

As the person earlier in the year elected by the branch to be our H&S contact I am now beginning to appreciate all that training I went through at Bridgend College and I am happy to get the chance to put a little of it into practice.

The Corporate H&S Committee is now up and running and I have already got my self known by the Officers responsible at this level. This is a new initiative by the Authority's Officers and the newly elected Labour members wanting a H&S partnership. It is intended to create a joint structure that can disseminate right through to every work place, then we will be in a better position to monitor and improve on our safety in the work environment. The main issues that have been introduced from this committee is: The Union Inspection Notices (UIN's) and the Domestic Violence Policy (HS26). The council now recognized UIN's as part of the safety reps, tool's to improve safety in your work place. This forum is on going and we are expecting future decisions leading to a much safer and healthier place of work.

If there is any issues that members think should be brought to the committee than please let me know.

Most departments have established and are running regular H&S meetings, however it is of concern that many areas have yet to adopt a system that will help identify and improve on the way we work safely.

Every work place should have a H&S committee meeting at least once a month. If you haven't got one then speak to your local Health & Safety Rep about setting one up. If you don't have a GMB rep, why not become one your self. On each forum you will need a representative from every area of the work place and somebody from management that has the authority to implement the recommended changes. To setup a committee two safety reps must put a request into writing to their line manager. Management have a maximum 3 months to initiate your request before they breach the law. (Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 Regulation 9.2.c). The manager must consult with the safety reps (SRSC Regs. 1977 Regulation 9.2.a).

Remember with the regular changes to H&S Law we each are becoming more accountable for our own safety and that of others and like the employer an employee can also be brought before a court and proportionately held for any blame in law. So please look after yourself and your work colleuags and report anything that you think is wrong or could endanger yourself.

I can be contacted on e-mail:

Craig.Jones@rhondda-cynon-taff.gov.uk

GMB - HELP & SUPPORT AT HAND

NEWS IN BRIEF

Housing Investment Review

Lyn Evans is remaining as our representative on the 'Steering Group' as well as transferring to a full time secondment with 'Job Evaluation'.

The group last reported to Cabinet in July and are currently following up a more detailed investigation into the three options with the intention of putting a recommendation back to Cabinet next January. The "ISA's" are in the process of circulating anonymous questionnaires to all employees affected. so be sure to return your comments.

You can view the latest news on this issue on the RCT 'Intranet' or you can telephone the freephone help line 0800 389 5619 and request an update or discuss any concerns in total confidence.

*****Branch Valentine Ball*****

Instead of our usual Christmas Party we are organising a 'Branch get-together' on the 11th Feb 06. Tickets and more information available soon.

Meals On Wheels

The Authority is well pleased with all staff members that have helped to make the new 7 day service an overwhelming success.

Weekend customer take-up is growing weekly and is rapidly approaching a 1,000 meals provided to the elderly in our community.

The branch negotiators will endeavour to use this success to obtain additional benefits for our members that have to make that weekend commitment in order for the service to continue and develop.

CHRISTMAS WORKING

Richy back in July contacted all divisional directors urging them to make Christmas requirements known for roles to be organised earlier and avoid the usual uncertainty staff have had to endure at this time.

Those front line employees who provide essential services will get 4 times pay for this Christmas & New Year. We recognise this is little compensation for having to give up quality family time, but it is a substantial cost for the Authority to implement and we all have a duty to maintaining a quality service to our community including holiday times.

E-coli Episode

We don't want to underestimate the seriousness of this recent food poisoning outbreak, given the sad death of Mason and the severity of others illnesses, however we have been upset by the media "over-reaction" and appalled at the recent press coverage of Clr. Hobson who's irresponsible comments suggesting that children can not expect safe food in our schools.

So concerned that such remarks will only further damage our 'School Meals' service we sent in a reply which unfortunately never went to print, but to all our members involved be 'cheerful for we recognise the good professional service you are providing and remind our readers that school kitchens were exonerated in as much as there was no trace of infection found.

SCHOOL CLEANING CONTRACT

'Blue Diamond' have secured the school cleaning contracts for a further 3 years protecting the jobs of it's 450 cleaning staff in RCT schools.

We would like to see these jobs back 'in-house' but until such a time we are happy to work with this private company that we have established good links with.

NEW RECYCLING DEPOT

AMGEN, RCT in partnership with the Welsh Assembly have put vast resources into developing for our future at Bryn Pica.

There are currently 30 employed with a further 20 jobs expected soon at this 21st century rubbish recycle depot that can only develop and expand. GMB has been involved from the beginning and are pleased with our working relationship with AMGEN that has lead to a single Trade Union partnership and 100% GMB membership.

The branch wish everyone involved much future prosperity.

FULL TIME SECONDMENT

Mark Bowler has taken up this challenge to assist Richy for the next 6 months, it's not been without it's 'teething' problems to organise however we hope Mark will enjoy the experience and become an help to many of you. The Executive was surprised by the response shown in this opportunity and will make their selection for the next 3 follow on opportunities shortly. We guarantee that all who expressed an interest will be considered as fairly as possible and contacted with our decisions and explanation.

TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

Richy Dally 01443 490891
Mark Bowler 07812 097768

All correspondence to:
GMB-RCT Branch
28e Taff Street
PONTYPRIDD CF37 4TR